ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

North Stearns Pipeline Extension Project
Project No. 73-7214
E.A. No. OR-056-01-027
Prineville District
Bureau of Land Management

I. Purpose and Need

The Brothers/LaPine Resource Management Plan (RMP, p. 78) places the Stearns Allotment (#5134) into an "Improve" management category, and cites (on page 81) pipelines as one of a number of range improvements to be applied in this allotment to reach rangeland improvement goals. The "Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management for Public Lands Administered by the Bureau of Land Management in the States of Oregon and Washington" cites (on page 17) water development installation as a practice appropriate for promoting the accomplishment of rangeland health goals. Both of these documents are available for review at the Prineville District, BLM office, located at 3050 NE Third Street, Prineville, Oregon.

II. Management Alternatives

A. Alternative A (Proposed Action)

The grazing permittee has requested authorization to extend an existing underground water pipeline and connect it to an existing water storage tank (see attached map). The primary objectives of this project are to increase the reliability of water transmission to the tank, and to reduce water transmission costs. (Currently, water is transmitted to the tank via truck water hauling).

This alternative would lead to the extension of an existing plastic water pipeline system for a distance of 0.8 miles. A 2-foot deep, approximately 18" wide trench would be dug with a ditch excavator, a 1-inch diameter plastic pipe laid in the trench, and the trench backfilled and smoothed over. After this was completed, a determination would be made concerning whether to allow local, genetically native species to reoccupy the 2-foot wide corridor, or to seed the corridor with native species not of local genetic origin.

Water feeding this pipeline would come from an existing well that is located on private land.

B. Alternative B

This would involve the construction of an earthen stock pond. This would involve cutting a large, 100 by 100 foot, hole and using the sidecast for a berm. After this was completed, a determination would be made concerning whether to allow local, genetically native species to re-occupy disturbed areas, or to seed the corridor with native species not of local genetic origin.

Water for this pond would come from natural overland or sub-surface flows.

C. Alternative C

This is the no action alternative, which would involve not taking any new action at this time. This would

lead to water continuing to be hauled to the existing water storage tank.

III. Affected Environment

A. Cultural Resources

The proposed project area lays near the west edge of the Crooked River canyon, south of the head of Swartz Canyon. The area is generally flat terrain and is covered by a juniper woodland. The nearest water source is located approximately 2 ½ miles NNW.

Within the immediate vicinity of the project area, a number of linear inventories have occurred [Bonneville Powerline Survey (no number), Report 90-05-15, and Report 00-05-12]. All of these inventories produced negative results. Probable causes for the lack of archaeological evidence includes the dispersed nature of faunal and floral resources in this particular landscape, the project's position relative to the Crooked River, and water sources in areas away from the project location.

The BLM knows of no Native American religious sites or traditional use locations in the vicinity of the project area.

No paleontological resources are know from this area.

B. Other Resources/Uses

The project site is within a sage-bunchgrass area having both post-European settlement and late-seral juniper trees. No Special Status plants have been found or suspected within this area in similar habitat, based on several inventories.

Soils are highly variable with minor elevation/relief shifts, such as the deeper pumice soils on the flats, and rocky, more ashy soils on rim tops.

The area is within the range of a broad array of species, including 31 under Special Status (see the Biological Evaluation dated March 29, 2001). In addition to the maintenance/improvement of Special Status species, a key wildlife habitat goal is the maintenance or improvement of mule deer and antelope winter range (RMP, p. 78).

Human activity is pronounced here. Within or immediately adjacent to the proposed project site are several roads/vehicle trails; a county rock pit; two corridors of regional power transmission supply lines; two fence lines; several dispersed camp sites; litter, trash and vehicle dumping areas; and two fence corridors.

No noxious weeds are known to exist here, although are fairly prevalent on private and public road networks throughout Crook County.

The proposed project site is not within any of the following areas: Prime or agricultural lands; Areas of Critical Environmmental Concerns; Floodplains; Wild and Scenic Rivers; or Wilderness/Wilderness Study areas.

IV. Environmental Impacts

A. Alternative A

1. Soils

This would lead to soil displacement and compaction along the pipeline route.

2. Vegetation

Vegetation along the pipeline route would be disturbed and/or removed, although it would re-occupy the site over time.

3. Visuals

Such vegetation removal/soil disturbance would not be readily visible from roads, although would be apparent to visitors walking near the pipeline route.

4. Livestock Grazing

High quality water would be available at the trough site during periods when so supplied, thereby supporting current management strategies.

5. Wildlife

Wildlife water availability and reliability would be improved. It would decrease current risks for wildlife/motor vehicle encounters. Effects to Special Status would range from not likely to adversely affect to no impact.

6. Cultural Resources

Should any sub-surface Cultural Resource material be present, this project would present any opportunity to find it. It would also pose risks for its disturbance.

7. Noxious Weeds

Noxious weeds are typically introduced into areas by motor vehicles. Since vehicle use would be reduced under this alternative, the risks for noxious weed importation and spread would be reduced.

8. Economics

Industry, residential and other human presence areas do not rely on truck hauling for water, but rather pipelines. This is because it is less expensive and more efficient to transmit water by pipeline than it is to transmit water by truck. Whereas truck hauling involves vehicle licensing; insurance; vehicle maintenance, repairs and replacement; truck driver wages, Social Security and other benefits; with pipelines, you only need to flip a pump switch, and the water is transmitted.
So it goes with this alternative. The pipeline would reduce the above kinds current water transmission costs incurred by truck water hauling.

9. Prime or Unique Agricultural Lands

No effects to these would occur.

10. Air Quality

No effects to this would occur.

11. Areas of Critical Environmental Concern

No effects to these would occur.

12. Environmental Justice

No effects to this would occur.

13. Floodplains

No effects to these would occur.

14. Native American Religious Concerns

No effects to these would occur.

15. Paleontological Resources

No effects to these would occur.

16. Solid or Hazardous Wastes

No effects to these would occur.

17. Wild and Scenic Rivers

No effects to these would occur.

18. Wilderness/Wilderness Study Areas

No effects to these would occur.

B. Alternative B

1. Soil

It would lead to the displacement of 22,500 square feet of surface soil.

2. Vegetation

It would lead to the removal of 22,500 square feet of vegetation; much of which would return over time.

3. Visuals

The pond would be visible from an adjacent road system.

4. Livestock Grazing Management

Less water would be available for livestock, making RMP-prescribed management more difficult to implement. Here's some reasons why:

First: EA page 1 (Paragraph II.B., Sentence #4) states the following: "Water for this pond would come from natural overland or sub-surface flows". The source of "natural overland or sub-surface flows" is from rainfall or snowmelt. If weather history were to repeat itself, in some years, there would be negligible precipitation, hence little or no water in the pond for stock.

Second: A pond would expose water to two primary evaporation agents - heat and wind. This would lead to much more water loss than with an underground water transmission system.

Third: Soils in the project area are very coarse, and water percolation/infiltration potentials higher than a clay-soil base. Water storage capability would ber hampered accordingly.

Fourth: Although a pond might fill up water, there would be no assurance that water would be present at the time the livestock were. Or that if present, the water would not be frozen.

5. Wildlife

Water availability for wildlife would be reduced, as would risks for vehicle-wildlife encounters.

Effects to Special Status species would range from no impact to not likely to adversely affect.

6. Cultural Resources

Should any sub-surface Cultural Resource material be present, this alternative would provide an opportunity to find it. It would also present risks for disturbance of such material.

7. Noxious Weeds

This alternative would increase risks for noxious weed importation and spread.

8. Economics

This would negatively effect current economics, since the timing and intensity of livestock grazing could not be predicted in advance, and greater stock movement costs would be incurred.

9. Prime or Unique Agricultural Lands

No effects to these would occur.

10. Air Quality

No effects to these would occur.

11. Areas of Critical Environmental Concern

No effects to these would occur.

12. Environmental Justice

No effects to these would occur.

13. Floodplains

No effects to these would occur.

14. Native American Religious Concerns

No effects to these would occur.

15. Paleontological Resources

No effects to these would occur.

16. Solid or Hazardous Wastes

No effects to these would occur.

17. Wild and Scenic Rivers

No effects to these would occur.

18. Wilderness/Wilderness Study Areas

No effects to these would occur.

C. Alternative C

1. Soil

No new soil disturbance would occur.

2. Vegetation

No new vegetation disturbance would occur.

3. Visuals

There would be no change to the visuals and scenic environment.

4. Livestock Grazing Management

There would be no change in the current livestock grazing situation.

5. Wildlife

There would be no changes in habitats, and no effects to Special Status species.

6. Cultural Resources

There would be no effects to these.

7. Noxious Weeds

No changes in risks for weed introduction and spread would result.

8. Economics

No change to current economic situation would result.

9. Prime or Unique Agricultural Lands

No effects to these would occur.

10. Air Quality

No effects to these would occur.

11. Areas of Critical Environmental Concern

No effects to these would occur.

12. Envrionmental Justice

No effects to these would occur.

13. Floodplains

No effects to these would occur.

14. Native American Religous Concerns

No effects to these would occur.

15. Paleontological Resources

No effects to these would occur.

16. Solid or Hazardous Wastes

No effects to these would occur.

17. Wild and Scenic Rivers

No effects to these would occur.

18. Wilderness/Wilderness Study Areas

No effects to these would occur.

V. Mitigation Measures

If any cultural resources were discovered during project activities, work would cease immediately and not resume until permission was obtained from District Heritage Specialists.

Vehicles/equipment would be checked for noxious weed plant or seed matter before entering the project area. Disturbed sites would be monitored over time for noxious weed presence; any of these species would be removed from the site upon their discovery.

No juniper trees greater than 15 inches in diameter at breast height (dbh) would be disturbed or felled.

If during construction active burrows or nests are encountered, work shall cease and the BLM wildlife biologist consulted before work resumes.

Construction activities during saturated soil moisture periods would be prohibited. Road construction would be prohibited. The permittee would be required return sidecast material to its original contour; to slash in the pipeline corridor to the degree necessary to inhibit unwanted off highway vehicle traffic; and to monitor vegetation along the corridor for a period of three years. If evidence indicates that native vegetation is not becoming re-established during this period, then the corridor would be seeded with native species.

VI. Residual Impacts

Neither the Proposed Action nor the stated alternatives would have any direct, indirect or cumulative impacts on the environment after application of the above stated mitigation measures.

VII. Coordination and Consultation

A. People and Agencies Consulted

A scoping letter for this project was neither prepared or distributed.

In accordance with BLM Handbook H-8160, such action was similarly initiated with the Klamath Tribes; the Burns-Paiute Tribe; the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs; and the Confederated Tribes of the

Umatilla via telephone. The only Governmental concern that surfaced was that necessary cultural resource surveys be performed and any required mitigations followed as part of this project..

Coordination was performed with the North Stearns Allotment permittee (QVR II) to acquire additional details concerning this project proposal.

B. Preparers

This document was prepared by the Rangeland Management Specialist assigned to this allotment. He consulted with Visuals, Recreation, Wilderness, Soil/Watershed, Archaeology, Wildlife, Plant and Rangeland Management and other specialists employed at the Prineville District of the Bureau of Land Management.

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Environmental Coordinator Date

Attachment: Project map